

# Brand Strategy for uncertain times

A new agile and responsive strategy for  
our uniquely uncertain and volatile times



# We live in uniquely uncertain times.



Unpredictable  
Events



Economic  
Uncertainty



Environmental  
Change



Nuclear  
Proliferation



Disease  
Outbreaks



Terrorist  
Threats



Information  
Uncertainty

Economic weakness and monetary crises affect many of the world's leading economies. Compound this with warp-speed technological change, wars, political instability, mass migration, environmental destruction, natural disasters and continuing terrorist threats – and uncertainties face businesses and brands on every side.

**Any business counting on smooth waters in the next 12-18 months is among the ranks of the uninformed.**

# Uncertainties face business and brands on every side.



Having a brand strategy to steer your brand through these uncertainties is more vital than ever

Yet most branding methodologies were not designed for the volatile market conditions that we face today – they are rigid, slow and out of touch.

# A new set of tools is needed.

CEOs, brand owners and marketers need a new faster, more agile and responsive approach and brand playbook that is more relevant to the strategic horizons we face in 2016/17 – and one that details how to deliver the strategy to every cell of the brand, internally and externally.

Six months today is equivalent to two years of time a decade ago. In times of rapid change, even the best traditionally created strategy may be the perfect one for yesterday's market. In branding, the great is very often the enemy of the good – business just can't wait months, it needs actionable content in weeks.

In military strategy, if you are unsure of the terrain ahead, then mobility is your key strategy, and in volatile market conditions branding is no different. Agility and responsiveness, adaptability and rapid reactivity are essential traits for market survival.

Consequently the brand strategy process must become faster, less linear, more flexible, and more collaborative.

**We outline 9 keys below to creating a more responsive and agile brand strategy for your business.**

# 1+1>2 Work in Parallel

1

**1.1** All parts of the brand strategy process should proceed in parallel rather than in series. This delivers results greater than the sum of their parts.

Agile thinking rejects the overly linear step-by-step framework in favour of combining tasks or performing them in parallel wherever possible to accelerate the branding process.

**1.2** Ideas can come from anywhere, and whereas traditional brand strategies will say that the process starts with research which informs the strategy which in turn informs the creative development.

Agile thinking turns this on its head and says that any part can inform any other part.

A great visual can inspire the brand strategy. An idea in the brand strategy can lead to a breakthrough in the research.

Working in parallel is a core tenet that underlies all of the other keys below.



Working in parallel delivers results greater than the sum of their parts

## Multidisciplinary Collaboration

### The client and brand consultancy become one team

**2.1** Typically a branding team will consist of the marketing team on the client's side, with limited input from the CEO, and 3-4 brand consultants from the agency.

Research and strategy ideas are presented and need to be approved rank by rank within the company. The essence of the agile branding approach is forming one team with all the decision-makers present – the agency and client working closely together.

Instead of each task being a time-consuming separate link in a long chain of command and approval, a cross-disciplinary team works together to bring the brand to life in real time, cutting months off the process.

2



One team with all the decision-makers present – the agency and client working closely together

## Overlap Thinking and Action

Involve design from the onset to ensure the message is transported to every cell of the brand



Ensure that every great idea is made actionable from the outset

**3.1** A key aspect of agile strategy development is combining thinking (analysis and strategy) and action (creative design and prototyping) into a single process – this ensures that every great idea is made actionable from the outset.

When strategists and designers work together to evolve a result jointly, the process is not only faster, but frequently yields unexpected insights. In many organisations this may mean having the product developer, web developers, branding team and marketing team all working together.

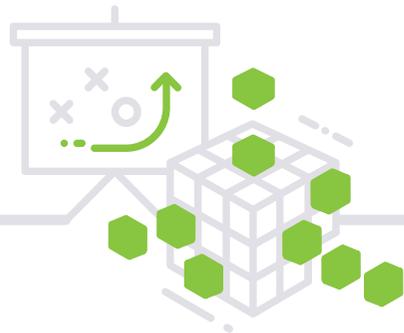
## Rapid Prototyping

Creating better results through an iterative process

**4.1** In agile brand strategy this is essentially the process of creating and releasing to the market beta versions of the brand strategy.

It starts by building several branding models and positioning directions – and assessing the feasibility and implications of each in real time.

**4.2** This means that each time the team meets, it's for a prototyping workshop. Team members should be selected based on their ability to collaborate and involve and push ideas across the finish line. Egos, and anyone sitting on the sidelines disparaging others' ideas, needs to be removed from the team as early in the process as possible. Continually improve with each meeting and turn the process into common company practice.



Each time the team meets it's for a prototyping workshop

## Design Your Brand as an Experience

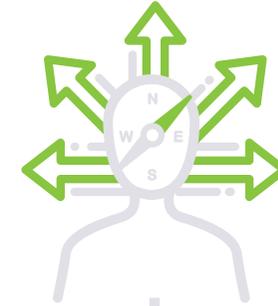
People remember experiences better than brands

**5.1** Every point of contact your customers have with your brand is an experience, and an opportunity to inspire and delight.

It needs to be specifically designed as an engaging experience that reflects your brand's personality and message at that specific touchpoint.

Every touchpoint should be outlined in the rapid prototyping process – and every idea should run through the filter of each touchpoint in real time.

5



Every point of contact is an experience, and opportunity to inspire

## Separate Principles from Features

Keep your focus on the high level principles of the brand, and the tactical details will fall easily into place



**Keep principles the same but evolve features to meet rapidly changing consumer needs**

**6.1** Today's brands must be flexible – open to evolution to meet rapidly changing consumer needs – but this does not mean that a brand is infinitely malleable, or it would lose all meaning.

Identify and preserve the core principle of the brand – the unalterable brand promise that the customer can rely on over time – while leaving all other facets in constant evolution.

# Find Your Unique Buying Tribe (UBT)

## Customers like to buy – not to be sold



**7.1** Customers are not what they used to be. They want to be better humans and follow higher-order wishes and values.

They seek satisfaction through and while purchasing. Wishes are combined and pursued in unique buying tribes – creating new dynamics.

For example social listening and similar online analytics allow you a fast track to find out who your specific customer groups are.



Identify the buying habits of the UBT for your product

## Monitor in Real Time and Recalibrate

Harness social listening, doubleclick and other analytics

**8.1** Most new brands conduct extensive consumer research before launch, but don't assume those findings will remain valid forever – 3 months is the data half-life for many industries.

Data mining and other analytical tools can keep your knowledge of your consumers up to date, facilitating rapid response when their needs and wishes change.

This means that any agile strategy team needs to be tech-savvy and on top of analytics on a daily basis – using it as a primary navigation tool for beta version development.



**Any agile strategy team needs to be tech-savvy and on top of analytics**

## Internal Alignment

An inspired workforce = greater profits



**A workforce that is fully aligned and inspired by the strategy will grow faster**

**9.1** Ensure that the agile strategy development is transported to every cell of your organisation. Organisations that have engaged staff well versed in the new brand strategy grow profits much faster and outperform competitors.

This means keeping the whole company in the loop of the progress and training staff at every brand strategy release.

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